

# Racial and Ethnic Minority Women in the Health Professions Roundtables

## Background

The Region I Office of Women's Health has contracted with the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston to organize a series of Statewide Roundtables in the six New England states to address health disparities by focusing specifically on gender and racial disparities in the health professions. The Sullivan Report and other studies have documented the impact of health workforce issues on racial disparities in health status and outcomes. However, these reports tend to focus primarily on the specific licensed health professions (for ex: physicians, nurses) with less attention on paraprofessionals (for ex: nurse aides, home health aides, and technicians) and, for the most part, do not examine the impact of gender, as well as race/ethnicity, in the full range of the health workforce.

The proposed roundtables also enjoy the support of the Region I Office of Minority Health and the University of Massachusetts Boston. The Roundtable Organizer is Michele Stewart-Copes who currently works with the Connecticut Department of Public Health's Office of Multicultural Health and is part of the planning of the 2007 New England Eliminating Racial Disparities Conference.

## Roundtable Goals and Activities

The goal of this project is to inform the current efforts to address health disparities by adding a focus on women of color in the health professions. We will invite representatives from a range of sectors involved in existing health disparities efforts to come together for a statewide roundtable held in each of the six New England states. At these roundtables, participants will:

1. Contribute to the debate over how to "solve the problem" of racial/ethnic health disparities by adding a focus on the disparities by gender as well as race/ethnicity in the health professions.
2. Stimulate discussion of the problems facing racial and ethnic minority women who work in the health care fields and identify potential policy solutions.
3. Share "best practices," models and other initiatives underway in each state.
4. Identify existing data – and missing data needed – to measure progress in promoting a more diverse health workforce.
5. Determine whether a regional summit (perhaps to coincide with the 2007 Region I Eliminating Disparities Conference) focusing on the topics discussed at the state-level roundtables would serve to encourage a sharing of "best practices" from state to state, identify additional information and research needed, and inform existing initiatives (for example, the development of state health plans).

### Issues to discuss:

- Underrepresentation by racial/ethnic minority women in the licensed health professions (physicians, dentists, nurses).
- Underrepresentation by racial/ethnic minority women in the medical technician fields.
- Overrepresentation by racial/ethnic minority women in the paraprofessions (i.e., nursing assistants/aides, home health aides, nursing home aides).
- Impact of nursing school closings on the recruitment of racial/ethnic minority women into nursing
- Enrollment/retention issues for racial/ethnic minority women in New England schools of medicine/nursing.
- Impact of the aging of the region's population on gender/race/ethnicity in the health workforce.
- Special issues facing immigrants (for ex., credential difficulties, among others).
- Issues unique to each state.

## Why Attend Your Statewide Roundtable?

Given our shared concern about racial/ethnic health disparities, there are many groups, meetings and conferences to attend that focus on this broad topic. Why attend “another meeting”?

1. There is considerable variability across the six New England states in the attention, progress, and resources dedicated to the issue of disparities for racial and ethnic minority women in the full range of health care professions.
2. Despite multiple state, healthcare system and academic efforts to improve the participation of racial and ethnic minorities in the health professions, there has never been a region-wide, full-scale conference to examine broadly and in depth, pipeline and career ladder issues for racial and ethnic minority women.
3. There is a great need for an analysis on the level of the Sullivan Commission Report that undertakes what it left out and considered equally problematic to disparities among physicians, nurses, and dentists: disparities among the other health care professions (as defined broadly to include direct care paraprofessionals and health technicians) as well as attention specifically on racial and ethnic minority women.

### Who is invited to attend/send a representative?

Office of Women's Health  
Office of Minority Health  
Community Health Centers/Organizations  
Immigrant Organizations  
Centers of Excellence Women's Health  
Health Care Providers  
Multicultural Health Commissions  
Politicians/Policy Makers  
Faith Communities  
Business Community  
Researchers  
Tribal Representatives  
Insurers

To find out when the statewide roundtable will be held in your state, or to get more information, please contact:

**Michele-Stewart Copes**

**Roundtable Organizer**

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